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RUEH DK/AMEMBASSY DAKAR 1491
RUEH KM/AMEMBASSY KAMPALA 1913
RUEH NR/AMEMBASSY NAIROBI 4341
RUEA IIA/CIA WASHDC
RUFOADA/JAC MOLESWORTH RAF MOLESWORTH UK
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 HARARE 000045

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AF/S FOR S. HILL,
ADDIS ABABA FOR USAU
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STATE PASS TO USAID FOR E. LOKEN AND L. DOBBINS
STATE PASS TO NSC FOR SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR B. PITTMAN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/23/2018

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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR TAKES POLITICAL PULSE IN BULAWAYO

REF: HARARE 16

Classified By: Ambassador James D. McGee. Reason: 1.4 (d)

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) On his first trip to Bulawayo (Zimbabwe's second largest city), the Ambassador met with leading opposition political figures and civil society leaders to gauge attitudes toward upcoming elections. They uniformly told him that an MDC victory in March was highly unlikely. Paul Themba Nyathi and David Coltart of the MDC Mutambara faction thought that a broad-based coalition that included Simba Makoni and former Joshua Nkomo lieutenant Dumiso Dabengwa could be a potent force, but they doubted Makoni would leave ZANU-PF. Bulawayo Mayor Japhet Ndebede Ncube supported the same broad-based coalition, but was skeptical there was enough time to put it together. Eddie Cross and Sam Nkomo of the MDC Tsvangirai faction were dismissive of the idea of a third force. Civil society leaders, including church representatives, expressed a lack of confidence in the MDC, and said they were looking to the post-election to fill what they believe will be a political void.

¶2. (U) The Ambassador visited Bulawayo from January 17-January 19. USAID Director, PAO, and Pol/Econ Chief accompanied him. During the trip, the Ambassador participated in a media roundtable where he articulated U.S. policy toward Zimbabwe and U.S. principles for reengagement. He also visited USAID humanitarian assistance projects, a self-help project, attended a reception for International Visitor alumnae, and attended a PAS-sponsored concert at a local high school. END SUMMARY.

MDC Mutambara Faction Leaders Support Broad-based Coalition

13. (C) MDC Mutambara faction members Paul Themba Nyathi and David Coltart told the Ambassador January 17 they were confident the MDC would do well in the anticipated March elections in Matabeleland. Coltart believed that Dumiso Dabengwa, a former Joshua Nkomo lieutenant who joined ZANU-PF as part of the 1987 Unity Accord and who is now a member of its Politburo, would split off from ZANU-PF and help the MDC win seats in Matabeleland and perhaps parts of Mashonaland where Dabengwa has some following. If Dabengwa worked with the MDC, a national parliamentary majority was possible.

14. (C) Neither Nyathi or Coltart was optimistic about MDC presidential chances in the election. Coltart noted that the MDC was weak in vote-rich Mashonaland, long a ZANU-PF stronghold. Nyathi added that many people in these rural areas were superstitious. They believed that their votes were not secret, and that individuals who cast votes for the MDC would be discovered by ZANU-PF officials who would then retaliate against them.

15. (C) Coltart opined that a Simba Makoni-Dabengwa-Tsvangirai coalition would be powerful and capable of defeating Mugabe. But he doubted this would occur. Makoni lacked courage to leave ZANU-PF, and Dabengwa was still deciding his course of action.

16. (C) On a side note, Nyathi, who was imprisoned by the Rhodesians and who later lost relatives in the Gukurahundi massacres of the early 1980's, insisted to the Ambassador that Mugabe must be held accountable for his participation in Gukurahundi. He said he and many other Ndebeles would not be satisfied to let Mugabe step down and live out his life in

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peace.

17. (C) Bulawayo Mayor Ndebede Ncube (affiliated with the Mutambara faction), during a courtesy call by the Ambassador on January 18, bemoaned the economic situation in Bulawayo and told the Ambassador that political change was imperative.

A possible solution, according to the mayor was an anti-Mugabe coalition of Makoni, Solomon Mujuru, Dabengwa, and Tsvangirai. These leaders would need to be brought together; there was little time before the election.

MDC Tsvangirai Faction Leaders Weigh In

18. (C) Eddie Cross, the policy coordinator for the MDC Tsvangirai faction, and Sam Nkomo, a Tsvangirai

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parliamentarian and provincial chairman of Matabeleland North, told the Ambassador on January 18 they were skeptical of the MDC's chances in the March presidential election. While the MDC was strong in Matabeleland, it lacked strong structures and sufficient personnel in Mashonaland. It had no money. And there was insufficient time to take advantage of an improvement in the political atmosphere that might emerge from the SADC talks.

19. (C) Nkomo, who unlike fellow Ndebele Dabengwa refused to join ZANU-PF in 1987, argued that a coalition with Dabengwa and Makoni was unlikely. He believed Dabengwa had little support, and it was doubtful Makoni would leave ZANU-PF.

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Church and Civil Society Leaders Look to Future
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10. (C) Church and civil society leaders from USAID partners, in meetings with the Ambassador on January 18 and January 19, expressed uniform lack of confidence in the MDC. They felt deceived by the MDC, which had not kept them informed about SADC negotiations and had provided them no

opportunity for input. They did not see what had been gained from the negotiations. In general, they told the Ambassador, people were apathetic. The MDC split had resulted in a perception that the MDC was ineffective, and apart from the MDC, there was a lack of faith in the integrity of the electoral process.

¶11. (C) The leaders said they supported participation in the upcoming election as an educational process. They also thought monitoring was important in order to document ZANU-PF fraud and retaliation against regime opponents after the election. A number of the Ambassador's interlocutors told him they thought there would be a political void after the MDC's defeat which could be filled by a new party.

The Ambassador Meets the Press

¶12. (U) The Ambassador addressed and took questions from about 20 local journalists on January 19 at a media roundtable organized by PAS at the Bulawayo Club. He made, inter alia, the following points:

- The U.S. supports free and fair elections that allow the will of the Zimbabwean people to be heard;
- The U.S. continues to support the Zimbabwean people with annual humanitarian assistance of over USD 170 million in food assistance and USD 35 million in HIV/AIDS assistance;
- International reengagement is dependent on political reform, including free and fair elections and restoration of the rule of law, and economic reform;

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- Land policy was unfair before Independence and has been a failure post-Independence, with Zimbabwe now a net importer of food vice a net exporter before land reform;
- He is ready to meet with the GOZ directly and explain our positions, but the GOZ has chosen not to meet with him; and
- Sanctions are targeted against GOZ and ZANU-PF policy makers and are not general.

Visits to U.S. Programs

¶13. (U) During his stay in Bulawayo, the Ambassador visited the USAID-funded Joint Initiative Humanitarian Aid program and Oxfam Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene program, a USAID-funded HIV clinic, and an Embassy-funded self-help project at a local orphanage. He also attended a PAS-sponsored reception for American citizens and International Visitor alumnae and a Harmony for Humanity concert, featuring local musicians, at a local high school.

COMMENT

¶14. (C) Along with Simba Makoni, Dumiso Dabengwa has been frequently mentioned recently as part of an opposition coalition. While both Makoni and Tsvangirai are Shona, Dabengwa is Ndebele and has impeccable liberation credentials. He is also close to Solomon Mujuru. His defection from ZANU-PF would be a significant blow to Mugabe. Dabengwa, like Makoni, is reportedly considering his options. Emissaries from Makoni, Mujuru, Dabengwa, and Tsvangirai are undoubtedly meeting with each other, but we

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have seen no evidence that the principals are planning to meet. While a broad-based coalition comprised of these individuals would have an excellent chance of defeating Mugabe, we have also seen no evidence that such a coalition is emerging. END COMMENT.

